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Alabama Care 2012 Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) – A Personal Perspective

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(ONE COMMENT)

By Cmdr. Scott A. Olivolo, MSC, USN (RC)



Alabama Care 2012 Demopolis Site Officer-in-Charge Cmdr. Scott Olivolo (right) explains the clinic set-up and procedures to Navy Medicine Support Command Reserve Component Executive Officer Capt. Robert Powers during a visit May 5. Alabama Care 2012 is an initiative designed to improve military readiness while simultaneously providing quality services to communities throughout America. Photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class (SW) Bruce Cummins

Several months ago, as I was “shopping” for a unique opportunity to perform my yearly two-week Annual Training (AT) as a Navy Reserve Medical Service Corps (MSC) officer, a trusted mentor introduced me to Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) projects.

IRT provides real-world training opportunities for military members (to include Reserve units) to prepare for wartime and humanitarian missions while supporting the needs of America’s underserved communities. From a medical perspective, IRT provides joint/multi-service medical/dental/veterinary/optometry support to a variety of Native American populations and in other communities located in remote areas throughout the United States and U.S. territories who don’t always have access to specialized medical care.

As a health care administrator, I was afforded the opportunity of serving as the officer-in-charge /team lead for the Demopolis mission site during the Alabama Care Black Belt 2012 IRT from April 30 through May 10, 2012. Our team at Demopolis and Pickensville, Ala., consisted of 77 health care providers, specialists/technicians/corpsmen, and administrative staff from the U.S. Navy Reserve, Air National Guard, Army National Guard, Air Force Reserve and Army Reserve.

During the operation, our team treated 4,036 patients at the building that formerly housed the New Era Cap Company—which makes ball caps for Major League Baseball and other organizations. Conservatively, over \$800,000 in medical/dental/optometry/nutrition/mental health/podiatry services were produced over the 11-day period. Our dedicated joint-service team worked 12-hour days, to include

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weekends, to maximize the amount of services provided to the residents of Demopolis and Pickensville. Some patients traveled from as far as Mississippi and Florida to seek care at our mission location. This fact clearly highlights the sobering reality that the demand for medical services far outweighed our capacity to fill that need. One of our dentists commented, “We could have five dentists working 24/7 and still not meet the demand.”

Just as our team’s expertise and dedication was pivotal to the operation’s success, the neighboring business, government and medical communities also played substantial roles in the initiative. We couldn’t ask anything more from the community. Local government and businesses provided everything from tables and chairs to cups, dental equipment, administrative supplies, industrial-sized fans and tents.

As Reservists, the benefits of IRT are clearly twofold: The primary benefit is training for humanitarian assignments and disaster preparedness at home in the United States or overseas. The other benefit is the provision of high-quality medical services to impoverished areas.

It was an absolute privilege to participate in an IRT, and it’s an experience I would recommend to any military member, active or Reserve, who is seeking a rewarding training experience and the chance to positively impact the lives of those in need.

Cmdr. Olivolo is a Medical Service Corps Officer in the Navy Reserve, who is serving as the Specialty Leader for Reserve Healthcare Administration and the Assistant Director for Administration, Operational Health Support Unit, Jacksonville, Fla..

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